

# REPORT OF THE MEETING OF WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY HELD ON 7 DECEMBER 2004

## *'Building Communities, Beating Crime' White Paper*

1. The Government has published a White Paper 'Building Communities, Beating Crime', which has three main objectives:

- Spreading neighbourhood policing to every community and embedding a genuinely responsive customer service culture
- Workforce modernisation to ensure the service is fully equipped to deliver these changes
- Greater involvement of the community and citizens in determining how their communities are policed

The White Paper sets out "10 Commitments to the public" and "10 Commitments to the police service". Details can be found on the Home Office Website [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk).

2. The Association of Police Authorities has responded comprehensively to the White Paper which the Police Authority supports while emphasising three points: -

- Police Authorities should continue to appoint Deputy and Assistant Chief Constables
- Support for local based Policing Boards to provide scrutiny and involvement at the police divisional level
- Any revision of appointments to Police Authorities should avoid the risk of politicisation

## ***Budget 2005/2006***

3. The Home Office Minister, Hazel Blears, announced the provisional Police Grant Settlement on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December. The level of the general grant for West Mercia has been set at the minimum level of 3.75% for 2005/6. There are 25 other authorities that are set to receive the minimum grant under the funding formula.

4. West Mercia's exact budget position will not become clear until the detail and any specific grants can be taken into account. However, at this stage, the headline figure of a £4 million increase in police grant is better than expected.

5. It was noted that new pension arrangements for uniformed officers will take effect from 1 April 2006 and that the Home Office is currently examining the pension scheme for new entrants, both changes could have a significant effect on costs.

## ***Capital Programme 2004/05***

6. The Authority has approved a number of new schemes funded from resources brought forward from 2003/04 revenue budgets. They include the provision of a Major Incident Unit at Stourport; the provision of extra operational space at Bromsgrove Police Station; fitting of Automatic Number Plate Recognition system and other equipment for

use by the Force Operations Department's new Intercept Team; and the extension of the car park at the Shropshire Divisional Headquarters in Shrewsbury.

7. The Authority's revised Capital Programme totals £14.957 million.

### ***Audit Letter***

8. The 2003/04 Audit Letter has been published and in the view of the external auditors, PricewaterhouseCoopers, this was a very strong report confirming that both the Force and the Authority have maintained the high standards demonstrated in previous years in relation to the accounts, financial aspects of corporate governance and performance management. In terms of improvement the auditors specifically indicated that West Mercia is now one of the highest performing forces in the country in respect of its arrangements for crime recording.

9. However, the external auditors point out that future budget setting will be extremely challenging in view of the significant additional funds that will need to be set aside for pension liabilities and the extent to which the Authority will have limited flexibility to increase the 2005/6 Council Tax precept following nomination by the Government.

### ***Setting Priorities for the Policing Plan 2005/2006***

10. The Authority received preliminary priorities for the 2005/6 Policing Plan from the Chief Constable. The proposals builds on the current year's strategic plan, responds to new legislation, and takes into account the results of crime and safety surveys and feedback from the PCCGs.

11. The proposals were presented within the framework of the four better outcomes:

- Provide Reassurance
- Reduce Crime, Increased Detections and More Offences Brought to Justice
- Reduce Disorder and Anti Social Behaviour
- Reduce Road Casualties

and will be the subject of consultation as soon as a draft budget strategy has been finalised.

### ***Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)***

12. HMIC are reformatting the Baseline Report in line with the Police Performance Assessment Framework model and have issued a draft revision. The key changes to the assessments of performance contained in the draft are that the gradings for Professional Standards, Criminal Justices Processes and Human Resource Management are all now measured as 'Fair', which means West Mercia has no areas of performance graded as 'Poor'. Particularly pleasing was the assessment for Leadership and Direction, which was described as 'Excellent' in two out of the three categories, and Reducing Crime and Providing Assistance which both scored 'Good' ratings.

13. HMIC carried out an Inspection of the Shropshire Division in June 2004, and the inspection team found a well managed, well-motivated division focused on delivering

results to the communities it serves. However a number of detailed areas for attention were raised, particularly in relation to the overall level of custody provision and other infrastructure issues at Shrewsbury. An action plan is being prepared to address the recommendations contained in the report.

14. The Authority particularly welcomed the very positive comments regarding the Special Constabulary at Shropshire Division.

### ***Performance Monitoring***

15. The Authority received a presentation on the performance of the force in 2003/04 measured against its strategic priorities. Members were informed that overall performance had improved and most operational targets were being achieved. Public satisfaction levels were higher, 60% being completely or very satisfied and a further 20% fairly satisfied. Burglary and Car Crime had dropped significantly and detection levels were rising. Targets for responding to emergency calls and for reducing the levels of absence due to sickness were just below target, and these were being addressed.

16. The Authority was anxious to improve engagement with the business community and this would be examined. It was noted that a report would be presented to the next meeting of the Force Performance Monitoring Panel on initiatives to reduce business crime.

17. The Authority received a report on Quality of Life indicators and the results of the West Mercia "Fear of Crime" 2003 survey. Residents have highlighted the following issues as having an impact on their quality of life: -

- ◆ Teenagers (wandering streets/threatening behaviour)
- ◆ Speeding vehicles
- ◆ Drugs
- ◆ Vandalism
- ◆ Litter
- ◆ Drunken behaviour

and would wish to see: -

- ◆ More police presence
- ◆ More activities for young people
- ◆ Better parking
- ◆ More street lighting

### ***Proceeds of Crime Act***

18. The Authority has agreed to the enhancement of the Economic Crime Unit and Force Operations Department. This Unit aims to recover the proceeds of crime and has already shown considerable success. A proportion of the recovered proceeds is returned to the Force reducing the demands on the Council Taxpayer.

### ***Community Support Officers***

19. It was noted that the Authority has been granted funding for 12 additional Community Support Officers (CSOs) out of a bid for 35. The CSOs are able to issue fixed penalty notices for disorder incidents, dog fouling, dropping litter and riding bicycles on footpaths. They can also demand the names and addresses of vandals or anyone acting in an anti-social manner. The number of CSOs in West Mercia will increase to a total of 79 following this successful bid.

### ***Human Resources***

20. The Best Value Review of Personnel Services focused on the key areas of recruitment, retention and development of West Mercia Constabulary's workforce, with managing diversity as a crosscutting theme. The Final Options Report identified 14 key areas for development, change and improvement. The Police Authority approved in principle a five-year programme for the implementation of the recommendations and has called for detailed costings to be prepared.

21. The Authority received reports on current overall force strength, current numbers of police officers, secondments and existing numbers of budgeted posts. The overall strength as at 1 November 2004 is 2386 police officers. In addition there are 40 officers on secondment to various organisations. The Police Authority reaffirmed their target to achieve and maintain a staffing level of at least 2400 full time equivalent police officers but recognised that retirements and recruitment rates will give rise to minor fluctuations in actual numbers.

22. The number of police officers and police staff from visible ethnic minority backgrounds continues to increase steadily. The Constabulary is ahead of its target for police staff and special constables and has almost achieved its 2004 target of 36 police officers.

23. The number of female police officers also continues to increase steadily with 22.1% of police officers being female. This is above the national average.

24. An abstractions report was presented showing that 20.5% of the 2,424 budgeted police officer posts and 19.5 % of the 1,602 budgeted police staff posts are not available for their core function due to a number of organisational reasons. These broadly consist of staff abstractions due to commitments to major enquiries, but also includes absences due to sickness, maternity leave and training.

25. 68% of candidates from West Mercia Constabulary were successful at the recent courses held at the Inspectors' Assessment Centre with 100% success rates for females and ethnic minority officers.

### ***Professional Standards***

26. During the period 1 April to 15 November 2004 there were 559 complaints recorded, this represents an increase of nearly 100% compared with the same period during the previous year. This is due largely to new recording practices which now include complaints relating to command and control issues. The Police Authority was

pleased to note that there has been a significant improvement in local resolution of complaints. This has released capacity within the Professional Standards Department to attend to those cases of a more serious nature which require formal investigation.

### ***Surveys***

27. With effect from 1 April 2004 the Home Office has required all police forces to ask mandatory core questions in their surveys. This will ensure that there is a standardised approach and that better comparisons can be made between forces. Victims of violent crime, dwelling burglaries, road traffic collisions, racist incidents and vehicle crime are surveyed about the service provided by the police 6-12 weeks after their first contact. An analysis of the first quarter results shows that the most significant issues affecting customer satisfaction are:

- First contact - being dealt with in a reasonable time
- Response - being given practical help
- Follow up - being kept informed of progress without asking
- Treatment - the officer/staff appearing to take the matter seriously
- Whole experience – being satisfied with police response (actions)

28. Following a review of the Fear of Crime survey, a Crime and Safety survey will be carried out during September-October each year in partnership with the West Mercia Local Criminal Justice Board. A number of changes have been made to the questions set out in the survey form and the sample size has been increased.

### ***Rural and Urban Safety Initiative***

29. The Authority received a report on the development of rural and urban safety initiatives. A survey of all parish councils in the force area has been carried out about the particular problems they are experiencing, and following this four pilot parishes were identified for a more in-depth survey. The information obtained has been used to develop a specific response initially to rural policing issues involving the training and introduction of a Rural Beat Manager, the development of a “Rural Safety Initiative” Tool Kit and the setting up of Rural Safety Groups. An Urban Safety Initiative is being piloted in a number of communities.

### ***Improving Community Engagement***

30. The Authority has undertaken a comprehensive review of its Community Engagement and has agreed recommendations that:

- a) recognise that the responsibility for partnership working lies within the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), but develops stronger reporting back arrangements;
- b) revise the membership of Community Policing Boards (CPBs) and re-focuses these groups on monitoring Divisional activity, particularly with regard to Community Engagement, whilst leaving partnership working to CDRPs;
- c) Clarify the reporting relationships for CPBs and CDRPs; and
- d) Enhance community engagement through better support to PCCGs and an updated communications strategy.

### ***Open Days***

31. Successful public open days were recently held at the newly built Bromyard and South Wye Police Stations in Herefordshire. The Authority has agreed as a standard policy that public open days should be held whenever a new station is opened.

### ***Independent Custody Visiting Scheme***

32. The Authority has agreed that an amendment be made to the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme to ensure that discussions between detainees and Independent Custody Visitors normally take place in sight but out of hearing of the escorting officer where that is practical.

Signed on behalf of the  
West Mercia Police Authority

R M Forster  
Chairman

### ***Further Information***

Any person wishing to seek further information on the subject matter of this report should contact David Brierley or Ian Payne on Shrewsbury (01743) 344314

### ***List of Background Papers***

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of the Police Authority) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda papers for the Meeting of the West Mercia Police Authority held on 7 December 2004.